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REVIEW OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION ACT 1980
Enhancing nature conservation in the Australian Capital Territory

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the review of the Nature Conservation Act.

I am a member of several organisations in the territory which focus on different aspects of the natural environment: The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra, Ginninderra Catchment Group, Mt Rogers Landcare group convenor, a member of Friends of Grasslands, Canberra Ornithologists Group, Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, The Australian Native Plants Society's Weed Swap Co-ordinator and a member of Friends of The Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

- **I strongly support the responses of the Conservation Council ACT Region in reviewing the 1980 Act.**

In particular I'd like to reiterate:

- The need for the NC ACT to have distinct objectives for approaches to nature conservation in the territory.
- The new legislation should reflect best practice in and experiences drawn from other jurisdictions and their legislation whilst simultaneously recognising the uniqueness of the ACT's position.
- The role of the Conservator needs to be strengthened and imbued with independence and power to influence on behalf of natural areas where appropriate
- Findings and recommendations from the recent, vital, investigations into Canberra Nature Park and the Urban Forest by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment should be accepted as valid influences on the new Act.
- The inefficiencies of having four agencies influencing the natural areas of the ACT and the territory's land management need to be urgently reduced.

Additionally:

- The NC Act should reflect the usually understated and undervalued importance all open areas in the ACT have for people and their wellbeing as well as the need for conservation for native species' sake.
- Can the Act make provisions that ensure funding for all forms of ACT land management in reserves, urban open space and public land is appropriate and guaranteed? This would include provision for contingencies such as natural disasters and the emergence of threats from new invasive species. Provision could also include the legality of seeking and accepting income from benefactors and sponsors and the establishment of trusts for 'the environment'.
- Insufficient funds come from the Australian Government for the maintenance of the natural heritage of Canberra as the nation's unique 'bush capital'. Australians living interstate would be horrified if they knew of the state of most of the territory's nature reserves as a result of the ACT Government having insufficient funds to adequately manage reserves, public land and to keep the ACT as a place that reflects civic pride and a well-organised municipality. Can the Act direct that funding be adequate, equitable and spent largely on on-ground works and projects?
- A comprehensive investigation into the optimum size and population for Canberra needs to be set up urgently as the current philosophy of constant growth into the city's hinterland and agricultural properties is unsustainable and defies logic for an inland city facing climate change. Conservation of the territory's native species and habitat cannot be effective, with or without a new Act, when such lands are only seen as a resource for developers and therefore revenue for government budgets.
- There is an imbalance in legislation if the Planning and Development Acts are more powerful than the Act that protects the land and wildlife of the territory or the country.
- The Act should provide for a register of the territory's estate by establishing the fauna and flora populations and distributions of all open space and reserve areas. There may be little point in conserving nature unless survey data can show what is to be conserved and the threats non-native species pose to local biodiversity.
- The great emphasis placed on linkages between Landcare and Parkcare volunteers, Catchment Groups and environmental educators and the residents of the ACT, the general public is essential if there is to be respect for nature reserves, urban open space, for other species. I hope the Act will honour the commitment made by those who share their knowledge with those who are yet to fully appreciate the unique natural history that surrounds our suburbs.

Rosemary Blemings
